



# SPEAKERS CORNER

Do you want speakers to provide faithful sound reproduction or simply make games sound better? Whatever your needs, you'll come in loud and clear with one of these 16 systems

## INTRODUCTION

You wouldn't put up with a blurry, distorted picture on your monitor, so why make do with shrivelled splutters and wheezes from your PC's speakers? The systems in this round-up will turn your PC into the best music system in the house, totally transforming your MP3 collection, games and DVD soundtracks.

On page 140, we test six stereo systems that offer a considerable upgrade to the sets usually bundled with PCs. On page 141 you will find six surround systems, which add another dimension to PC audio. Finally, on page 142, we look at stereo systems designed specifically for music production, where clarity and faithful accuracy is more important than sonic flattery.

We've unearthed the systems that treat both your ears and your wallet with the respect they deserve.

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## Choosing... Speakers

In this Labs test we have identified the best speakers for a range of budgets and requirements. But how do you know which one best meets your needs?

Stereo sets need no introduction. Most use a 2.1 configuration, which means two satellite speakers for the middle and high frequencies and a subwoofer to handle the bass. Using a single subwoofer is cheaper than having two, and it works because our ears can't detect where bass sounds are coming from. Two separate subwoofers would give a stereo bass effect, but we wouldn't be able to tell the difference. Some stereo sets don't use a subwoofer, and these might be preferable if you have limited space or want a more portable system that can follow a laptop around the house. Most of these 2.0 systems cost just a few pounds and sound fairly basic, but Creative's Gigaworks T40 aims to deliver high-quality sounds in a 2.0 format. However, if you're looking for a system without a subwoofer, we strongly recommend M-Audio's AV 40. It's designed primarily for music making, but it's also an excellent general-purpose system.

Surround speakers are ideal for DVDs and games, allowing sound to come at you from all directions. The difference over stereo is dramatic, and the enveloping nature of surround sound helps draw you into the action. It can even give you a tactical advantage in games, as you can hear the direction of footsteps and

gunfire. However, you have to find space for the five satellite speakers, and then trail cables to each one. If there's a door in the way you might have to take the long way around the room, and you might find the supplied cables aren't long enough.

### STUDIO TIME

Studio speakers, often referred to as monitors (nothing to do with the monitors you look at), are designed for audio and video production, and have a different set of priorities to normal PC and hi-fi speakers. Rather than creating a sound that's as flattering and exciting as possible, their job is to reproduce sounds as faithfully as possible. When you're making music or a video soundtrack, you need to hear exactly what you're doing and don't want to be unwittingly over-compensating for souped-up bass or congested middle frequencies.

The pricier studio speakers here have volume controls on the back. These are designed to be set and left, with the master volume adjusted on a mixer or external audio interface. Their balanced jack and XLR inputs mean they won't easily connect to normal sound card outputs and their quality means they deserve better, anyway. If you're considering one of the £100-plus studio systems, we recommend pairing it with a USB audio interface such as M-Audio's Fast Track Pro, which is reviewed in *What's New: Audio* on page 49.

## 2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS

GENIUS  
SW-i2.1 1100

★★★

£24 inc VAT  
From [www.microdirect.co.uk](http://www.microdirect.co.uk)

This is the lowest-priced speaker system here, a fact that's sadly reflected in its appearance. The satellites, wired remote and subwoofer all have a cheap plastic finish and a design that looks like it took five minutes to come up with. The connections are all sensibly located, with one mini-jack input on the subwoofer and a second on the wired remote alongside a headphone-out, volume and power controls. However, the 1.6m cables from the subwoofer to the satellites and the 1.3m captive power cable could prove frustratingly short.

There are no tone controls, which is worrying on a subwoofer-based system. The bass level was about right in our test lab, but this can vary depending on where the subwoofer is placed. Bass was tight and punchy, but not particularly deep. Middle frequencies were muddy and high frequencies were weak. None of these problems is severe, but overall this set is bottom of the group for sound quality.

2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS 28W power, 2x 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE 31730523100

DETAILS [www.geniusnet.co.uk](http://www.geniusnet.co.uk)

✓ Low price

✗ Lack of clarity and high-frequency detail

LOGITECH  
X-230

★★★★★

£30 inc VAT  
From [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)COMPUTER  
SHOPPER  
BEST BUY

Logitech's X-230 is a veteran of *Labs*, this being its third appearance in as many years. Its sound quality is astonishing for the price. The compact subwoofer produced loud, deep bass that put the pricier 2.1 sets to shame, and the satellites displayed a richness and clarity that flattered every kind of music with which we tested them. Logitech's Z-4 produced crisper high frequencies and more focused bass, but the X-230's more balanced tone makes it the best-sounding 2.1 set here.

The satellites' smart design belies the low price. The headphone socket and volume and power controls are integrated into the right satellite, which is neater than a wired remote. Unfortunately, the right satellite is also the hub for subwoofer, left satellite and PC connections, all of which are captive; using the subwoofer as the hub would cut down on desktop clutter. Still, this is worth putting up with for the sound quality and value that the X-230 provides.

2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS 32W power, 3.5mm stereo cable

PART CODE 970123-1120

DETAILS [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

✓ Fantastic sounds for the price; smart appearance

✗ Messy cabling

ALTEC LANSING  
VS2421

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT  
From [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)

The VS2421's satellites are bulkier than those of the other 2.1 sets, but its subwoofer is the most compact. Volume and treble controls are on a wired remote, with bass adjusted at the back of the subwoofer. Annoyingly, the line input is on a 1.9m captive cable sprouting from the remote. A subwoofer-mounted socket would have been neater. The remote also has a built-in microphone, fed to the sound card via a 3.5in socket that is also on the remote rather than subwoofer. Its position meant that our voices sounded thin, had to compete with ambient noise and were prone to feedback. A headset microphone will give better results.

Sound quality isn't as warm as Logitech's X-230 or as detailed at the Z-4, but it's not far behind in either regard and is generally excellent. The diminutive subwoofer produced an impressive amount of bass, and the treble control is welcome for customising high frequencies to personal taste. Ultimately, though, the cheaper X-230 gives better sounds.

2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS 28W power, 3.5mm stereo cable, 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE E3613

DETAILS [www.alteclansing.co.uk](http://www.alteclansing.co.uk)

✓ Pleasing sound quality; treble and bass tone controls

✗ Cabling could be neater

ALTEC LANSING  
VS4221

★★★

£45 inc VAT  
From [www.scan.co.uk](http://www.scan.co.uk)

The VS4221 is only a little more expensive than the VS2421, but it looks much more imposing with its funky satellites and beefy subwoofer. The conical satellite bases house mid-frequency speaker cones. Dual tweeters in the vertical sticks handle high frequencies and can be angled to face the listener.

A headphone-out and volume control are mounted on the right satellite, but these up and down volume buttons aren't as immediate as a knob. Pressing both simultaneously acts as a power switch, although the speakers draw 7W when off. The treble and bass controls are even less accessible, located on an infrared remote control. There are no direct controls to fall back on if the remote is lost.

The big subwoofer produced plenty of bass, but was imprecise and didn't blend well with the satellites' output. These suffered from an uneven frequency response, making music sound muddled. The sound wasn't disastrous, but it didn't fare well in comparative tests.

2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS 35W power, 3.5mm stereo, dual phono inputs

PART CODE E3252

DETAILS [www.alteclansing.co.uk](http://www.alteclansing.co.uk)

✓ Smart design

✗ Woolly sounds; tone controls on wireless remote only

LOGITECH  
Z-4

★★★★★

£50 inc VAT  
From [www.morecomputers.co.uk](http://www.morecomputers.co.uk)

The Z-4's satellites look stylish without being too fussy. The wired remote control includes a large volume knob as well as a bass control, making it much easier to adjust than the subwoofer-mounted bass controls of Logitech's X-230 and Altec Lansing's CS2421. There's an audio input on the sub and another alongside the headphone-out on the remote.

At moderate volumes, the Z-4 produced the best bass of the 2.1 sets, with deep basslines, kick drums and explosions reproduced with precision and focus. The X-230's subwoofer went louder before it distorted, though. High frequencies were bright and glossy compared to the other 2.1 sets, but nowhere near as detailed as the studio speakers such as M-Audio's AV 40. This bright tone flattered DVDs, games and certain types of music, but made others seem a little harsh compared to the X-230's smoother sound.

It's swings and roundabouts choosing between the X-230 and Z-4 for sound quality, but we prefer the former, which also costs less.

2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS 40W power, 2x 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE 970175-0120

DETAILS [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

✓ Glossy, detailed sounds; elegant design

✗ Some music sources sound a little harsh

CREATIVE  
Gigaworks  
T40

★★★★★

£70 inc VAT  
From [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

The T40 is an upgrade to the T20, reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* 220. It has the same subwoofer-less design, but it increases the power rating from 14W to 28W and uses three cones per speaker to produce more volume. The lack of a subwoofer makes this set better suited to offices, homes where space is at a premium, or for use with a laptop where mobility is an issue. However, the bulky external power adaptor means the floor won't be free from clutter.

Perhaps it's unfair to compare the T40 to the subwoofer-based competition, but direct comparisons didn't lie in the T40's favour. Bass was thin and high frequencies were over-pronounced, which flattered some music sources but made others sound harsh. Still, there was plenty of detail. In isolation, the bass response didn't seem unpleasantly lacking.

If compactness is more important than deep bass then the T40 is a tempting option, but M-Audio's AV 40 (reviewed on page 142) is far superior and costs only £11 more.

2.0 STEREO SPEAKERS 28W power, 3.5mm stereo input

PART CODE 51MF1585AA000

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

✓ Smart, compact design

✗ Disappointing sound; bulky external power adaptor

## CREATIVE Inspire A500

★★★★

£35 inc VAT  
From [www.dixons.co.uk](http://www.dixons.co.uk)



Surround speakers don't come much more affordable than this set, but its design does not betray its low price. A solitary volume knob sits at the end of the wired remote, with the subwoofer level adjusted on the back of the sub itself. There's no headphone output and the input plugs are on a captive cable that sprouts from the wired remote.

Considering its price, the fact that the A500 doesn't sound awful counts in its favour. First impressions were excellent, with a fair amount of volume on tap and a reasonably balanced sound. However, closer scrutiny revealed a slightly harsh, messy tone with a lack of detail, particularly in comparison with the other surround sets. This didn't flatter music and DVDs, though games' soundtracks fared better.

If you just want to make a lively racket, the A500 is great value. However, it's worth spending a little more on Logitech's considerably superior X-540.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 47W power, 3x 3.5 stereo cable (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 51MF4095AA004  
DETAILS [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

- ✓ Acceptable sounds at a low price; compact design
- ✗ Can sound harsh

## LOGITECH X-540

★★★★★

£52 inc VAT  
From [www.morecomputers.co.uk](http://www.morecomputers.co.uk)



This low-cost surround set earned itself a Best Buy award in *Labs, Shopper* 232, so we were keen to retest it against the new arrivals. Its controls seem simplistic by today's standards, with only subwoofer and overall volume levels and no control over the balance of the satellites. An upmix button is included, creating a pleasing pseudo-surround effect from stereo sources. There's no auxiliary input for connecting an MP3 player, but we don't see much point in this feature, as the same MP3 collection probably also resides on the connected PC's hard disk.

Sound quality is stunning for the price. There was a richness and vitality to music that we rarely hear from PC speakers. Clarity and detail was on a par with Logitech's X-230 stereo set, but bass was a bit deeper. However, Logitech's G51 surround system exhibited even deeper, tighter bass and slightly more focused high frequencies. Still, if the G51 is out of your budget, the X-540 is an excellent alternative.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 70W power, 3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 970223-0120  
DETAILS [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

- ✓ Great sounds for the price; smart, compact design
- ✗ Basic features and controls

## LOGITECH G51

★★★★★

£97 inc VAT  
From [www.aria.co.uk](http://www.aria.co.uk)

COMPUTER  
SHOPPER  
BEST BUY



The G51 is the newest addition to Logitech's surround speaker line-up. The gunmetal and black colour scheme is aimed at gamers, and the satellites have Perspex covers under which artwork can be inserted (visit [www.logitech.com/G51skins](http://www.logitech.com/G51skins) for game-themed designs to print out). The wired remote is well laid out and includes surround upmix options that make stereo music sources fill the room. It includes headphone-out and microphone pass-through sockets, making it easy to plug in a headset. As with many of the surround systems, the rear satellite cables could do with being longer.

Sound quality is arguably the best of the surround systems here, with a balanced tone that flattered all genres of music, crisp detail and a warmth and richness no other system could match. The top volume wasn't as loud as that of Genius's and Logitech's Z-5500 systems, but it was far from lacking. With excellent sound quality at a reasonable price, it is our Best Buy.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 155W power, 3x 3.5mm stereo cable (5.1), dual phono inputs  
PART CODE 980-000116

- DETAILS [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)
- ✓ Superb sound quality; accessible controls
  - ✗ Speaker cables a little short

## GENIUS SW HF5.1 5000

★★★★

£105 inc VAT  
From [www.laptopsandpcs.co.uk](http://www.laptopsandpcs.co.uk)



The wooden veneer and the sheer size make this set more suited to living rooms than PC setups. We don't normally like subwoofer-mounted controls, but they're fairly accessible here. There's no headphone output, though.

Three stereo and two 5.1 surround inputs accommodate a range of sources, but DVD players need internal Dolby Digital decoding as there are no digital inputs or a built-in decoder. PCs using the analogue 5.1 inputs need a bass-redirection option on their sound card's utility software. When using 5.1 inputs, the subwoofer reproduces only those sounds fed to it on its dedicated input; the other surround systems use the subwoofer for low frequencies from all channels. Front, centre and rear channels will sound weak unless you have a sound card with bass redirection. Tests revealed detailed front satellites and enormous bass to rival Logitech's Z-5500, but stereo music was lacking in mid-frequencies, the surround channels were worse, and the centre sounded muddled.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 150W power, 3x dual phono, 6x phono (5.1), proprietary DIN (5.1) inputs  
PART CODE 31730467101

DETAILS [www.genius-europe.com](http://www.genius-europe.com)

- ✓ Huge bass performance
- ✗ Inconsistent sound from the satellites; bulky

## ALTEC LANSING FX5051

★★★

£130 inc VAT  
From [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)



Subwoofers are usually brutish-looking things that are best kept tucked out of view, but this one looks quite stylish. The satellites are smart and compact, but the wired remote lets the side down. At 15W, power consumption after switching off is higher than some sets when in use. A USB port accompanies the usual trio of mini-jack inputs, and is welcome for use with laptops that don't have surround audio outputs. The speaker cables are colour coded for easy installation, but the 4m cables for the rear satellites will be a problem except in the smallest of rooms.

Our tests revealed finer precision and greater high- and low-frequency extension than Logitech's entry-level X-540 set, but the G51 was even better in all respects. The FX5051 failed to match the warmth of both Logitech sets, as the compact satellites failed to reproduce lower-mid frequencies with as much power as higher ones. As long as the USB input isn't essential, Logitech's G51 will provide better sound for less money.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 89W power, 4x 3.5mm stereo (5.1, stereo), USB inputs  
PART CODE E3601

DETAILS [www.alteclansing.co.uk](http://www.alteclansing.co.uk)

- ✓ USB and analogue inputs
- ✗ Sound lacks warmth; high standby power consumption

## LOGITECH Z-5500 Digital

★★★★★

£200 inc VAT  
From [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)



Logitech's flagship Z-5500 speakers came top in our home-cinema Labs in *Shopper* 242, so we were curious to see how well they would perform in a PC-based environment. The main challenge is finding a home for the subwoofer, which measures 300x455x300mm. The stylish wired remote houses triple-analogue plus optical and coaxial digital inputs. Dolby Digital and DTS decoding is built in, but this isn't so relevant to PC users, as DVD-playback software can decode these formats and few PCs have digital audio outputs.

The subwoofer is capable of deep, focused bass at volumes that made us fear for our internal organs, and the satellites had no problems keeping up. At less terrifying volumes, music was full-bodied and detailed, and the tone was brighter than Logitech's G51 and the studio sets. This accentuated the surround effect in games and DVDs and flattered some music, but made other music sound aggressive.

The Z-5500 is excellent, but the cheaper G51 makes more sense with PCs.

5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS 505W power, 4x 3.5mm stereo (5.1, stereo), coaxial S/PDIF, optical S/PDIF inputs  
PART CODE 970115-0120

DETAILS [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

- ✓ Massive bass and overall volume; lots of inputs
- ✗ Bright tone won't please everyone



## 2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS

### ALESIS M1 Active 320 USB

★★★★

£69 inc VAT  
From [www.dv247.com](http://www.dv247.com)



At 188mm high, Alesis's entry-level studio speakers are half the height of the 620 set. The back of the right speaker houses stereo mini-jack, phono, ¼in jack and USB inputs. The latter lets users bypass a PC's built-in sound without resorting to a musician's sound card. You can even use the speakers' other inputs to record line-level sources to the PC. The 115cm cable joining the two satellites is too short, and the mini-jack speaker cable isn't easy to replace.

Sounds from the 320 USB were precise and authoritative, but while a Bass Boost switch provided extra low-frequency punch, bass wasn't that deep. Very high frequencies were lacking, too, and the top volume was tame.

The compact design and USB connection make this an attractive prospect for musicians working with a laptop, but sound quality is only narrowly up to the demands of music production. M-Audio's AV 40 costs just £12 more and offers a huge leap in sound quality.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 20W power, 3.5mm stereo, dual phono, dual ¼in jacks, USB inputs  
PART CODE M1A320USB  
DETAILS [www.alesis.com](http://www.alesis.com)  
✓ Lots of input options  
✗ Satellite cable too short; lacks very high/low frequencies

### M-AUDIO Studiophile AV 40

★★★★★

£81 inc VAT  
From [www.pcw.b.com](http://www.pcw.b.com)

COMPUTER  
SHOPPER  
BUDGET BUY


M-Audio's AV 40 houses all its inputs and amplification in one of the speakers. This design risks slight discrepancies in the tone of the two speakers, but we struggled to spot any, and the payback is the convenience of a single power cable, volume knob, headphone socket and front-mounted mini-jack input. Phono and balanced ¼in jack inputs on the back cater for entertainment and recording studio setups.

The speakers exhibited a clarity that put them in a different league to Alesis's 320 USB entertainment-oriented speakers. The pricier studio speakers revealed more detail, but the difference was marginal. Bass was impressively full-bodied for such a compact design. A Bass Boost switch fills it out further if flattery is more important than accuracy.

The AV 40 offers around 95 per cent of the quality of ESI's superb nEar 05 for around half the price. They are a great choice for both music production and appreciation.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 40W power, 3.5mm stereo, dual phono, dual ¼in balanced jacks inputs  
PART CODE 9900-52161-08  
DETAILS [www.tapcoworld.com](http://www.tapcoworld.com)  
✓ Detailed, full-bodied sound; compact, practical design  
✗ Pricier sets offer greater clarity

### FOSTEX PM0.4

★★★

£100 inc VAT  
From [www.dv247.com](http://www.dv247.com)



The PM0.4 is the baby of Fostex's PM range and, at 220mm high, is second only to Alesis's 320 USB for compactness. The plain design and glossy finish seem a little tacky, but the speaker cones look reassuringly expensive. They aren't protected from wandering fingers, but the tweeter is recessed so it shouldn't be knocked accidentally. Power switches for each speaker are at the back below protruding heatsinks, making them hard to press.

Music exhibited similar levels of clarity and detail as from the pricier studio speakers. However, higher frequencies were a little over-pronounced. Bass frequencies rolled off gently below 100Hz. This isn't surprising considering the compact design, but M-Audio's similarly sized AV 40 managed better bass performance. The combined effect of the bright treble and weak bass could lead to mistakes as musicians try to compensate while mixing. The AV 40's more balanced tone, better ergonomics and lower price make it a far better choice.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 72W power, dual ¼in balanced jack, dual phono inputs  
PART CODE FOSPM04  
DETAILS [www.fostexinternational.com](http://www.fostexinternational.com)  
✓ Crisp, detailed sound  
✗ Modest top volume; high frequencies over-pronounced

### ESI nEar 05 eXperience

★★★★★

£153 inc VAT  
From [www.dolphinmusic.co.uk](http://www.dolphinmusic.co.uk)

COMPUTER  
SHOPPER  
BEST BUY


The nEar 05 is our favourite-looking studio set and, at 250mm high, it appears authoritative without taking up lots of space. The power switches mounted on the backs of each speaker are inconvenient, though. It's easy to knock the volume trim controls when reaching around the back. Fortunately, they don't drain power when switched off. The delicate silk-dome tweeters sit proud of the front fascia and risk damage from curious fingers, so you'll need to keep children and idiots at bay.

There are no tone controls, but given the nEar 05's balanced output we didn't need any. The frequency response was smooth from deep bass to high treble, and the speakers exhibited the greatest precision and clarity of all the systems here, revealing intricate details in complex mixes. The pricier studio sets manage more volume and a little more low-frequency sound, but the nEar 05 offers everything we would want from a pair of studio speakers at a very reasonable price.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 140W power, dual ¼in balanced jack, dual XLR inputs  
PART CODE ESINEX05-200  
DETAILS [www.esi-pro.com](http://www.esi-pro.com)  
✓ Neutral tone and superb clarity; stylish design  
✗ Vulnerable tweeters

### ALESIS M1 Active 620

★★★★

£199 inc VAT  
From [www.dv247.com](http://www.dv247.com)



Each of the M1 Active 620 speakers is bigger than most PC speakers' subwoofers, but they don't look too imposing. Power switches are easily accessible on the top of each speaker, but they draw 26W of power when on and silent or off, so they're really glorified mute switches.

The exposed tweeters are vulnerable to damage and exhibited a small amount of signal noise, especially when the volume trim controls were turned right up. Otherwise, sound quality was impressive, with plenty of volume on tap and sparkling clarity throughout the frequency spectrum. High frequencies were a bit excessive, but the dip switches on the back allowed us to tame them. The bass performance was the deepest and fullest of all the studio speakers, but we found it a little too much for accurate monitoring purposes, and the dip switches weren't able to bring it back in line.

The 620 speakers are the best-sounding speakers here, but ESI's and Behringer's sets are more faithfully accurate.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 190W power, dual ¼in balanced jack, dual XLR inputs  
PART CODE M1A620  
DETAILS [www.alesis.com](http://www.alesis.com)  
✓ Exciting, detailed sound  
✗ Not as accurate as the best here; vulnerable tweeters

### BEHRINGER Truth B2031A

★★★★★

£246 inc VAT  
From [www.dolphinmusic.co.uk](http://www.dolphinmusic.co.uk)



These speakers weigh 15kg each and, at 400x250x290mm, demand lots of space. There are separate 150W and 75W amplifiers for the low- and high-frequency drivers in each speaker, providing lots of headroom. Limiters are built in to avoid damage to the drivers due to excessive volumes, but ear-splitting volumes were required to make the Limit LEDs light up. The tweeters are protected from external damage by metal meshes. Power switches are on the back, which you'll need to use as the auto-standby mode consumes 38W of power.

Each speaker is tested at the factory and sold as matched pairs with individual frequency response diagrams. These show a nominally flat response from just 40Hz, but the curve gets bumpy above 10kHz. This matched the results of our listening tests; the speakers displayed deep bass and lots of high-frequency detail, but the clarity was just behind ESI's nEar 05.

The B2031A set is incredibly loud, but ESI's nEar 05 is more accurate and cheaper.

2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS 450W power, dual ¼in balanced jack, dual XLR inputs  
PART CODE B2031A  
DETAILS [www.behringer.com](http://www.behringer.com)  
✓ Precise and accurate sound; huge top volume  
✗ Large

| COMPUTER SHOPPER<br>BEST BUY |                       |                                              |                                  |                                  |                         |                               | COMPUTER SHOPPER<br>BEST BUY    |                                         |                                         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| MANUFACTURER                 | GENIUS                | LOGITECH                                     | ALTEC LANSING                    | ALTEC LANSING                    | LOGITECH                | CREATIVE                      | CREATIVE                        | LOGITECH                                | LOGITECH                                |
| Model                        | SW-i2.1 1100          | X-230                                        | VS2421                           | VS4221                           | Z-4                     | Gigaworks T40                 | Inspire A500                    | X-540                                   | G51                                     |
| Rating                       | ★★                    | ★★★★★                                        | ★★★★                             | ★★                               | ★★★★                    | ★★★                           | ★★★                             | ★★★★★                                   | ★★★★★                                   |
| Speaker configuration        | 2.1                   | 2.1                                          | 2.1                              | 2.1                              | 2.1                     | 2.0                           | 5.1                             | 5.1                                     | 5.1                                     |
| RMS power output             | 28W                   | 32W                                          | 28W                              | 35W                              | 40W                     | 28W                           | 47W                             | 70W                                     | 155W                                    |
| Power consumption standby    | 4W                    | 5W                                           | 5W                               | 7W                               | 4W                      | 7W                            | 2W                              | 6W                                      | 12W                                     |
| Power consumption on         | 8W                    | 8W                                           | 12W                              | 12W                              | 9W                      | 10W                           | 11W                             | 14W                                     | 19W                                     |
| Analogue inputs              | 2x 3.5mm stereo       | 3.5mm stereo cable                           | 3.5mm stereo cable, 3.5mm stereo | 3.5mm stereo, dual phono         | 2x 3.5mm stereo         | 3.5mm stereo                  | 3x 3.5 stereo cable (5.1)       | 3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1)                   | 3x 3.5 stereo cable (5.1), dual phono   |
| Digital inputs               | None                  | None                                         | None                             | None                             | None                    | None                          | None                            | None                                    | None                                    |
| Dock                         | None                  | None                                         | None                             | None                             | None                    | None                          | None                            | None                                    | None                                    |
| Headphone output             | 3.5mm                 | 3.5mm                                        | 3.5mm                            | 3.5mm                            | 3.5mm                   | 3.5mm                         | None                            | 3.5mm                                   | 3.5mm                                   |
| Satellite cable lengths      | 1.6m left, 1.6m right | 1.8m left, 1.8m right                        | 1.5m left, 1.5m right            | 2m between satellites            | 1.9m left, 1.9m right   | 2m between speakers           | 1.7m left/right/centre, 4m rear | 1.6m left/right, 2.2m centre, 4.4m rear | 2.3m left/right, 1.6m centre, 4.4m rear |
| Cable type                   | Captive               | Captive                                      | Captive                          | Captive                          | Captive                 | Captive                       | Captive                         | Captive                                 | Captive                                 |
| Controls location            | Wired remote          | Volume on right satellite, bass on subwoofer | Wired remote, bass on subwoofer  | Right satellite, infrared remote | Wired remote            | Right satellite               | Wired remote, bass on subwoofer | Wired remote                            | Wired remote                            |
| Digital processing           | None                  | None                                         | None                             | None                             | None                    | None                          | None                            | Surround upmixing                       | Surround upmixing                       |
| Tone controls                | None                  | Bass                                         | Bass and treble                  | Bass and treble                  | Bass                    | Bass and treble               | Bass                            | Bass                                    | Bass                                    |
| Price including VAT          | £24                   | £30                                          | £40                              | £45                              | £50                     | £70                           | £35                             | £52                                     | £97                                     |
| Supplier                     | www.microdirect.co.uk | www.amazon.co.uk                             | www.play.com                     | www.scan.co.uk                   | www.morecomputers.co.uk | www.amazon.co.uk              | www.dixons.co.uk                | www.morecomputers.co.uk                 | www.aria.co.uk                          |
| Details                      | www.geniusnet.co.uk   | www.logitech.com                             | www.alteclansing.co.uk           | www.alteclansing.co.uk           | www.logitech.com        | http://uk.europe.creative.com | http://uk.europe.creative.com   | www.logitech.com                        | www.logitech.com                        |
| Part code                    | 31730523100           | 970123-1120                                  | E3613                            | E3252                            | 970175-0120             | 51MF1585AA000                 | 51MF4095AA004                   | 970223-0120                             | 980-000116                              |

| COMPUTER SHOPPER<br>BUDGET BUY |                                                      |                               |                                                   |                                          |                                                   | COMPUTER SHOPPER<br>BEST BUY        |                                   |                                   |                                   |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| MANUFACTURER                   | GENIUS                                               | ALTEC LANSING                 | LOGITECH                                          | ALESIS                                   | M-AUDIO                                           | FOSTEX                              | ESI                               | ALESIS                            | BEHRINGER                         |
| Model                          | SW HF5.1 5000                                        | FX5051                        | Z-5500 Digital                                    | M1 Active 320 USB                        | Studiophile AV 40                                 | PM0.4                               | nEar 05 eXperience                | M1 Active 620                     | Truth B2031A                      |
| Rating                         | ★★★                                                  | ★★                            | ★★★★                                              | ★★★★                                     | ★★★★★                                             | ★★                                  | ★★★★★                             | ★★★                               | ★★★★                              |
| Speaker configuration          | 5.1                                                  | 5.1                           | 5.1                                               | 2.0                                      | 2.0                                               | 2.0                                 | 2.0                               | 2.0                               | 2.0                               |
| RMS power output               | 150W                                                 | 89W                           | 505W                                              | 20W                                      | 40W                                               | 72W                                 | 140W                              | 190W                              | 450W                              |
| Power consumption standby      | 13W                                                  | 15W                           | 8W                                                | 2W                                       | 0W                                                | 0W                                  | 0W                                | 26W                               | 38W                               |
| Power consumption on           | 32W                                                  | 26W                           | 52W                                               | 9W                                       | 11W                                               | 17W                                 | 22W                               | 32W                               | 44W                               |
| Analogue inputs                | 3x dual phono, 6x phono (5.1), proprietary DIN (5.1) | 4x 3.5mm stereo (5.1, stereo) | 4x 3.5 stereo (5.1, stereo)                       | 3.5mm stereo, dual phono, dual ¼in jacks | 3.5mm stereo, dual phono, dual ¼in balanced jacks | Dual ¼in balanced jacks, dual phono | Dual ¼in balanced jacks, dual XLR | Dual ¼in balanced jacks, dual XLR | Dual ¼in balanced jacks, dual XLR |
| Digital inputs                 | None                                                 | USB                           | Coaxial S/PDIF, optical S/PDIF                    | USB                                      | None                                              | None                                | None                              | None                              | None                              |
| Dock                           | None                                                 | None                          | None                                              | None                                     | None                                              | None                                | None                              | None                              | None                              |
| Headphone output               | None                                                 | 3.5mm                         | 3.5mm                                             | 3.5mm                                    | 3.5mm                                             | None                                | None                              | None                              | None                              |
| Satellite cable lengths        | 3m left/right/centre, 8m rear                        | 2m left/right/centre, 4m rear | 4.5m left/right/centre, 7.5m rear                 | 1.15m between satellites                 | 2m between satellites                             | N/A                                 | N/A                               | N/A                               | N/A                               |
| Cable type                     | Replaceable                                          | Captive                       | Replaceable                                       | Replaceable                              | Replaceable                                       | Replaceable                         | Replaceable                       | Replaceable                       | Replaceable                       |
| Controls location              | Subwoofer                                            | Wired remote, wireless remote | Wired remote, wireless remote                     | Right satellite                          | Left satellite                                    | Rear of speakers                    | Rear of speakers                  | Rear of speakers                  | Rear of speakers                  |
| Digital processing             | None                                                 | None                          | Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, surround upmixing | None                                     | None                                              | None                                | None                              | None                              | None                              |
| Tone controls                  | Bass                                                 | Bass and treble               | Bass                                              | Bass lift                                | Bass lift                                         | None                                | None                              | Bass cut, mid boost, treble       | Bass cut, treble                  |
| Price including VAT            | £105                                                 | £130                          | £200                                              | £69                                      | £81                                               | £100                                | £153                              | £199                              | £246                              |
| Supplier                       | www.laptopsandpcs.co.uk                              | www.play.com                  | www.play.com                                      | www.dv247.com                            | www.pcbw.com                                      | www.dv247.com                       | www.dolphinmusic.co.uk            | www.dv247.com                     | www.dolphinmusic.co.uk            |
| Details                        | www.genius-europe.com                                | www.alteclansing.co.uk        | www.logitech.com                                  | www.alesis.com                           | www.tapcoworld.com                                | www.fostexinternational.com         | www.esi-pro.com                   | www.alesis.com                    | www.behringer.com                 |
| Part code                      | 31730467101                                          | E3601                         | 970115-0120                                       | M1A320USB                                | 9900-52161-08                                     | FOSPM04                             | ESINEX05-200                      | M1A620                            | B2031A                            |

## Labs verdict Speakers

Designing great speakers is more about craftsmanship than advances in technology. This is why some of the speakers reviewed here are a few years old but have yet to be improved upon.

It's clear Logitech employs some gifted acoustic engineers. Its latest system, the G51, raises the bar for mid-price surround speakers and, on balance, it is the best-sounding system Logitech has ever produced.

It's also clear that the company knows when to stick with a winner. Its X-230, X-540 and Z-5500 aren't new, but they're the best budget stereo, budget surround and high-end surround systems respectively, not just compared to the other systems on test this month but also any speaker system we've ever reviewed.

Logitech doesn't make speakers designed for music production, but the companies that do have their fair share of talented engineers.

Here, the competition was much more intense, and the worst-rated Fostex PM0.4 is still an excellent system. Two sets stood out, though. At £81 including VAT, M-Audio's AV 40 is superb value. Its compact, home-oriented design makes it a superb choice for entertainment as well as music production. However, if you're serious about making music, ESI's nEar 05 eXperience is the best speaker system for the job. **CS**

### 2.1 STEREO SPEAKERS

#### LOGITECH

##### X-230

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER  
BEST BUY

### 5.1 SURROUND SPEAKERS

#### LOGITECH

##### G51

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER  
BEST BUY

### 2.0 STUDIO SPEAKERS

#### M-AUDIO

##### Studiophile AV 40

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER  
BUDGET BUY

#### ESI

##### nEar 05 eXperience

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER  
BEST BUY